



voice

■ vocational rehabilitation ■ disability determinations ■ independent living ■

Offering Independence

Twenty-two centers offer services that help consumers live their lives independently.

*By Lisa Sone, Quality Manager
VR Central Office*

The Independent Living program is part of the Missouri Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. It provides services for people with disabilities to increase their independence and their opportunities to participate in day-to-day life within the community.

The philosophy of independent living is that people with all types of disabilities should have the same civil rights as those without disabilities. Individuals with disabilities have a right to control their lives based on options that minimize their reliance on others. In the late 1960s, Centers for Independent Living (CILs) were created to help people manage their own lives. Federal funding became available in 1978 to



This ramp was built for a consumer of the Southwest Center for Independent Living (SWCIL) by volunteers. (Photo courtesy of SWCIL)

support the CILs' operations.

Missouri has 22 CILs throughout the state offering independent living services. CILs are administered and funded through VR grants and are managed by individuals with disabilities who have been successful in establishing their own independent lifestyles.

Each CIL offers four core services: peer counseling, advocacy, information and referral, and independent living skills training. CILs may also provide other services that

include but are not limited to legal services, housing services, transportation services and educational services.

The following are center-provided examples of positive outcomes consumers have experienced through CIL services:

- Last year, a consumer who was a single mother of four passed away unexpectedly. Since then, the children have begun to recover while living with other relatives. During the holiday season, a CIL was able to

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- secure holiday presents for the children through the 100 Neediest Cases sponsored by the United Way. The center has also been able to assist them with referrals to grief counseling.
- A consumer contacted a CIL for assistance with personal care and consumer-directed services. Her Social Security income was too high to qualify for funding. Staff referred her to several agencies that gave her access to in-home services and information on senior citizen complexes in the area. Referrals from the center helped to meet her vision and dental needs.
 - A consumer sustained a spinal cord injury and is now quadriplegic. She had been living with her sister for the last four and a half years, but for the first time she is now living on her own with her 12-year-old daughter. A CIL assisted the consumer in finding funds to cover an initial moving-in fee. She and her daughter were also submitted for the 100 Neediest Cases in the St. Louis area and received holiday gifts along with income to assist with utilities.
 - One consumer had a brain aneurism in the early 1990s. Services from the Department of Health and Senior Services'

Consumer-Directed Services (CDS) program, along with independent living skills and training in finances, have enabled him to take care of his personal finances and make sure all of his commitments are met. "I have overcome this, and I am a living testament to independent living," he said.

- In 2008, the third annual Special Needs Prom for youth ages 15-22 was hosted by one of the CILs. The main goal is to provide a fully accessible, fun, regular prom for those who

*"I have overcome this,
and I am a living testament
to independent living."*

might have missed the event during high school, or for those who would like certainty that there will be services such as accessible restrooms, etc.

- Staff at one CIL worked with a consumer to transition her from a nursing home back into her own apartment. She had lost both of her legs due to a medical condition. Staff worked with housing agencies to find the consumer a place to live. A historic hotel in the area had been renovated, and she was able to move into a new apartment that is accessible for

her needs. The center worked with United Access to get her a bed and a wheelchair, and the CIL specialist secured equipment for her bathroom. She also uses center transportation services for dialysis and visits to the doctor.

- A 49-year-old female consumer suffered a stroke and was moved to a rehabilitation facility out of state. After rehab, she moved to Missouri to live with her parents. The consumer's parents contacted a CIL to discuss computer accessibility and durable medical equipment. The center was able to assist in obtaining adaptive computer hardware and software through TAP-I that made using the computer an attainable goal. The consumer was also instructed on how to obtain a wheelchair through Medicaid and was able to access information on her Social Security benefits by working with the Community Work Incentives Coordinator (CWIC) at the center. Physical therapy has allowed her to progress with her mobility skills. This consumer is now able to live as independently as possible in the least restrictive environment.

For more information, visit the Missouri Statewide Independent Living Council's Web site at www.mosilc.org.



In Remembrance

Lyman Trachsler Jr., a former VR employee, died March 6, 2008. Trachsler had worked for the division for more than 20 years, starting out as a counselor in the Rolla office in 1984. He moved up to the position of district supervisor of the Kirksville VR office in 1993. Trachsler changed course in the division in 2000 when he was promoted to director of Personal Assistance Services. He retired from VR in November 2005.

Even though he had left VR, Trachsler did not leave the service of helping those in need. He went to work as the executive director of West-Central Independent Living Services in Warrensburg, where he continued to help others until his death.

During the Vietnam War, Trachsler was a Navy corpsman attached to the Marines as a medic. He received several medals, including the Silver Star, in recognition of his service.

He is survived by his wife, Betty; two sisters; a brother; and nieces and nephews.

Koller Represents the U.S. at World Summit on Learning Disabilities

For years, Dr. Jim Koller, a professor in the Department of Education and Counseling Psychology at the University of Missouri-Columbia, has taught Introduction to Learning Disabilities to new VR counselors.

VR staff know that Koller is a powerful speaker with vast knowledge and experience in the fields of psychology and rehabilitation. In April, Koller was able to showcase his expertise to people from around the globe at World Summit 2008: Learning Disabilities – Fact or Fiction, a conference held in Alberta, Canada. Twenty-three countries were represented by 250 participants, and Koller had the honor of representing the United States.

Summit participants included world experts in the areas of learning disabilities (LD) and ADHD; professionals in law, medicine, psychology, research, government, education and business; and consumers.

"The purpose of this important summit is to transition learning disabilities from an invisible disability into a visible ability," said Brenda Martin, summit chairperson and coordinator of Estelle Siebens Community Services in Calgary, Alberta.

Koller delivered three presentations on the topics of learning disabilities, ADHD and mental health. He lectured on the importance of helping people with disabilities obtain jobs to sustain themselves and their families. Koller spoke a great deal about vocational rehabilitation and said he was "honored and pleased to mention Missouri Vocational Rehabilitation."

Koller suggested that more attention should be paid to mental illness. "We need to be more sensitive to those with LD and emotional problems," he said. "Such problems make it even more difficult to find employment."

His philosophy is that "you need to look at what's right with a



Dr. Jim Koller

person rather than what's wrong."

"Some countries don't know what LD is," Koller said. "We are light years ahead of the world with regard to transition and employment. Some countries don't even have rehab programs or policies."

After his talks, dozens of people approached Koller to share personal stories or to ask for more information. A woman whose child had recently been diagnosed with learning disabilities asked what he would say to the parent of a child with LD.

"Stay positively involved in your child's life," Koller said. "Do all you can do to help your child and just tell them that you love them."

Voice of our consumers



In this section, consumers, partners/suppliers and division employees can voice their opinions, views or appreciation to our division and staff. Some letters will be printed in their entirety while longer letters might only have excerpts printed. Consumers' names are omitted to protect their confidentiality. All letters are subject to editing.

Consumer feedback

To Vocational Rehabilitation and Christopher Bibbs,
I really don't know how to

thank you for all you've done or explain what changes you've made in my life. I've had so many people comment on the big differences they see in the way I carry myself, my confidence level, my eyes sparkle, I smile so much, etc., when I am working. You also provided my new hearing aids. I have never heard, in 30 years, some of the sounds the digital aids pick up. It's way better than the old ones ever were. The chairlift is a godsend. Trying to carry stuff and climb stairs is extremely hard. I often had to stop and sit until my legs were ready

again. I just wanted to thank you and share how what you've done for me has helped in my life.

Christopher Bibbs is a senior counselor in the St. Louis North VR office.

Feedback from a consumer's sister

I want to take this opportunity to praise Monica Bax for her professionalism. Monica was the counselor involved in my sister's disability claim. Monica was

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always a professional no matter how often we phoned with questions, concerns and delays. She is an employee who goes beyond the duties of her position. As a taxpayer, I'm proud to contribute to her salary.

Monica Bax is a senior counselor in the Jefferson City DD office.

Consumer feedback

Dear Sharon,

I want to thank you, personally, and the staff of VR in Sedalia for assisting me achieve my goal of becoming a real estate agent. Your assistance helped me more than you may ever know. I want to thank you for seeing me whenever I stopped by to simply ask you a question without an appointment. You always answered my question immediately or contacted me the next day.

Additionally, I want to thank you for helping me find the best way to get the education and funding I both desired and needed. Without your assistance, I may have never accomplished my goal. Thank you again for all of your support.

Sharon Loveland is a senior counselor in the Sedalia VR office.

Feedback from a consumer's family

Mr. Pflieger,

We would like to extend our thanks for your efforts in processing the paperwork for disability. Your follow up on paperwork was greatly appreciated.

Don Pflieger is a senior counselor in the St. Louis DD office.

Consumer feedback

I remain extremely grateful to you and your staff for managing my case last year during my application for disability benefits. We spoke several times during the process; and you always listened patiently, answered clearly and, above all, showed genuine concern, respect and a desire to help. Michele, you're great! Thank you so much!

Michele Delgado is a senior counselor in the St. Louis DD office.

Feedback from a letter Joyce Carter, district supervisor in the St. Louis DD office, received from a consumer

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude and deep appreciation for the expertise and professionalism demonstrated by one of your consultants, Angela Bennett. Congratulations for having such a capable and dedicated individual on your team.

Angela Bennett is a senior counselor in the St. Louis DD office.

Consumer feedback

Dear VR and Kelly,

Wanted to say thanks for all of the hard work and time you did with me. Thank you for getting me a new TDD and also a loud ringer for the telephone. I sure appreciate all you have done; and a big thanks for the new hearing aid, two earmolds and cord. It seems like I'm hearing even better now.

Kelly Cook is a senior counselor in the Columbia VR office.

Feedback from a letter Mike Cook, director of operations in Central Office VR, received from a consumer

Mr. Cook,

I would like to thank you for all the work, support and assistance you have given me for my cow / calf production business. This opportunity has been a dream come true.

Also, I would like to mention on how great the Kirksville office has been. Mr. Higgins, Belinda and Cindy have been wonderful. Thank you again.

Jim Higgins, district supervisor, and Cindy Schnirch, secretary III, are located in the Kirksville VR office. Belinda Ames is a former senior counselor.

Consumer feedback

I am writing to express my gratitude for the opportunity to start my own business and be able to compete on a more professional level of skill and knowledge. Many people told me I was wasting my time because VR doesn't help a lot of people. My response to that is most of them did not know what they wanted or needed (and did not) put forth an honest effort into their business plans.

Both Laura and Cathy were informative and patient in helping me to overcome my lack of academic training. It has been a long road for me but one I believe will help me. Thank you once again.

Laura Wallen is a senior counselor in the Sedalia VR office. Catherine Seeley is a former VR senior counselor.

Employee Changes from January to June 2008

Promotions

Joyce Carter, an assistant district supervisor in the St. Louis DD office, promoted to district supervisor

Shani Greenberg, senior counselor in the St. Louis DD office, promoted to assistant district supervisor

Gwen Harper-Jackson, a senior counselor in the West Plains VR office, promoted to district supervisor

Dale Kaiser, an assistant director in Central Office DD, promoted to director of medical services

JoEtta Snell McCoy, a senior counselor in the Cape Girardeau DD office, promoted to assistant district supervisor

Melanie McDonald-Student, a counselor in the Springfield South VR office, promoted to senior counselor

Jim McGowin, a senior counselor in the St. Louis DD office, promoted to assistant district supervisor

Gwynn Olson, a counselor in the Kansas City VR Transition office, promoted to senior counselor

Jenny Yinger, a counselor in the Kansas City VR Transition office, promoted to senior counselor

New Hires

Jill Benne, an accountant I in Central Office VR

Margaret Daniels, a counselor in the Joplin VR office

Diana Fontana, a counselor in the Rolla VR office

Dianna Gil, a counselor in the Rolla VR office

Tammy Hickman, a counselor in the West Plains VR office

Jacqueline King, a counselor in the Springfield North VR office

Carlee Liebhart, a counselor in the Columbia VR office

Karen Lovingier, a counselor in the Kirksville VR office

Roger Stephenson, a counselor in the Kansas City North VR office

Steven Eric Underwood, a counselor in the Kansas City DD office

Retirements

JoAnn Conrad, a hearing officer in the Springfield DD office, retired March 31 after 27 years of service.

John Jamison, a senior counselor in the Springfield North VR office, retired May 30 with 25 years of service.

Transfers

Jennifer Dunlap, a senior counselor in the Cape Girardeau DD office, transferred to the Jefferson City office.

Paula Niswonger, assistant district supervisor in the Cape Girardeau DD office, transferred to professional relations officer.



Theresa Dudenhoeffer retired from the state on April 30 after 33 years of service. She started in the DDS section in 1975. A brunch was held April 11 in Central Office.



voice

Please tell us how your newsletter can best serve you. Call Lisa Sone at (573) 526-7010, e-mail her at lisa.sone@vr.dese.mo.gov, or send comments to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, 3024 Dupont Circle, Jefferson City, MO 65109-6188.

MRA Honors VR Employees

VR employees once again took top honors at the Missouri Rehabilitation Association (MRA) annual conference June 1-3 at Tan-Tar-A in Osage Beach.



Clarinda Unger (left), coordinator of Client Services in Central Office VR, presented the Administrator of the Year award to Ron Parker (right), district supervisor of the Cape Girardeau VR office, for his "outstanding service toward meeting the needs of his staff and the rehabilitation community."



Carrie Pugh (left), senior counselor in the Kansas City Transition VR office, received the Counselor of the Year award from Maureen Alexander (right), regional manager in the Kansas City East VR office. The award "recognizes outstanding contribution by a counselor in the rehabilitation community who goes above and beyond to service persons with disabilities."



Pam Schleif (right) MRA president and VR administrative assistant III in the Kansas City East VR office, presented the President's Award to Maureen Alexander, regional manager in the Kansas City East VR office. The award is "given at the discretion of the MRA president to someone who has gone above and beyond in being supportive of his/her position."



Christy Tiffany (left), administrative assistant in the Columbia VR office, received the Outstanding Support Staff award from Duane Shumate (right), district supervisor of the Columbia VR office. The award "recognizes outstanding contribution by a support staff in the rehabilitation community who goes above and beyond to service persons with disabilities."

Missouri DDS Receives Kudos

The Social Security Administration has recognized the hard work and dedication of Missouri DDS. DDS received three awards at the National DDS Management Forum April 29 in New Orleans. DDS was awarded the Commissioner's Citation for "exemplary performance in accuracy, timeliness and productivity in providing exceptional service to the disabled citizens of Missouri." Michael Grochowski, SSA's regional commissioner, commended the staff's exemplary performance.

"The Missouri DDS successfully reduced initial claims pending, increased productivity, and decreased processing time by nearly 10 days while retaining an accuracy rate well above the national average," he said.

The Commissioner's Citation was also awarded to the Missouri DDS eCDR Pilot Team in "recognition of outstanding performance in leading the nation in the development of a new electronic Continuing Disability Review process." The eCDR team members are Mark Bernskoetter, district supervisor, Springfield;



Linda Foster (left), senior counselor in Springfield, accepted the Commissioner's Citation on behalf of the DDS eCDR Pilot Team. Kathy Davis (right), hearing officer in Springfield, received the Associate Commissioner's Citation.



Michelle Scherer, DDS administrator, accepts the Commissioner's Citation. Pictured left to right: Linda McMahon, SSA deputy commissioner; Michelle Scherer; Ruby Burrell, SSA associate commissioner; and Michael Grochowski, SSA regional commissioner.

Brad Bledsoe, assistant director – MIDAS Development, Central Office; Rochelle Davis, senior counselor, Springfield; Linda Fick, director – MIDAS Development, Central Office; Linda Foster, senior counselor, Springfield; Teresa Fulford, secretary III, Cape Girardeau; Lisa Hammond, senior counselor, Cape Girardeau; Karen Herrmann, senior counselor, Springfield; Melinda Huggins, senior counselor, Cape Girardeau; Rebecca LaMar, senior counselor, Cape Girardeau; Alecia Ahart Latz, regional manager, Springfield; Mike Schiffner, assistant district supervisor, Springfield; Arlene Schnurbusch, secretary III, Cape Girardeau; JoEtta Snell McCoy, assistant district supervisor, Cape Girardeau; Heather Styer, senior counselor, Cape Girardeau; Amy

Swain, senior counselor, Cape Girardeau; Greg Turner, senior counselor, Springfield; Glenda Wagner, secretary III, Springfield; Mary White, hearing officer, Cape Girardeau; Carla Young, computer information tech II, Cape Girardeau; and Carleen Ziehmer, senior counselor, Springfield.

Kathy Davis, a hearing officer in the Springfield DD office, received the Associate Commissioner's Citation in "recognition of outstanding performance in adjudicating disability claims and for leading the nation in developing an electronic Continuing Disability Review appeals process." Kathy held the first eCDR face-to-face hearing in the nation and helped to write the instructions for DDS staff to follow.



On Dec. 5, 2007, Gov. Matt Blunt proclaimed the city of Liberty as Missouri's Capital for a Day. State agencies were invited to exhibit their services to the public. Representing VR were Yvonne Wright, district supervisor, St. Joseph VR office; Pam Schleif, administrative assistant III, and Maureen Alexander, regional manager, from the Kansas City East VR office.

Service Awards

Five Years

Linda Hilderbrand, senior counselor, STL Downtown VR

Michael Metz, assistant district supervisor, Springfield North VR

Elizabeth Odom, senior counselor, Jefferson City VR

10 Years

Rick Longley, coordinator, Admin. Services, Central Office VR

Andrea Swope, senior counselor, Springfield South VR

15 Years

Chandra Carter, computer information technician II, STL DD

Amanda Engelman, senior counselor, STL West/Transition VR

Beverly Gardner, senior counselor, Jefferson City VR

Evelyn Platz, senior counselor, Springfield South VR

Myra Rackers, director, quality assurance, Central Office DD

Donna Schepers, human resource analyst III, Central Office VR

Claudia Van Oostrom, assistant director of training, Cape Girardeau DD

20 Years

Sadye Gartland, senior counselor / state consultant for assistive tech., STL West/Transition VR

Caroline Levy, senior counselor, Columbia VR

25 Years

Timothy Gaines, coordinator, development and consumer affairs, Central Office VR

Alecia Ahart Latz, regional manager, Springfield DD

30 Years

Ruth Hummel, hearing officer, Kansas City DD

Marianne Schmitt, secretary III, St. Louis DD

Mission Champion Award Winners

January 2008

- **Kathy Davis**, hearing officer, Springfield DD

March 2008

- **Alan Altmansberger**, billing specialist, Kirksville VR
- **Cindy Schnirch**, secretary III, Kirksville VR

April 2008

- **Melissa Eakens**, secretary II, Cape Girardeau DD
- **Randy Libbert**, director, Admin. Support Services, Central Office VR
- **Stephanie Monahan**, billing specialist, KC VR Transition
- **Donna Schepers**, HR analyst III, Central Office VR

May 2008

- **Lisa Sone**, Quality Manager, Central Office VR



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